

EPA'S CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM

Why Is EPA Working to Improve Customer Service?

To rebuild public trust.....The people's trust in government plummeted from 76% in the mid-1970's to 17% in the mid -1990's. Improving our service can help rebuild trust and confidence in EPA as well as our ability to protect public health and safeguard the natural environment.

To achieve a mandate.....The Government Performance & Results Act of 1993 (**GPRA**) has as two of its purposes:

- "improve the confidence of the American people in the capability of the Federal Government, by systematically holding Federal agencies accountable for achieving program results, [and]
- improve Federal Program effectiveness and public accountability by promoting a new focus on results, service quality and customer satisfaction."

In 1993, an **Executive Order** directed all Federal agencies to put customer service standards in place, use customer feedback to measure how well they were performing against those standards, and report to the public about that performance. All Federal agencies also were urged to make information more understandable and easily accessible.

Customer Service at EPA

All across EPA people are working hard to achieve the mission of the Agency, and in doing so, to serve their ultimate customers, the people of the United States. EPA's Customer Service Program (CSP) was established to help all of us who work at the Agency do an even better job of serving all our customers, both external and internal.

What's been done so far?

Organizing

- **Standards** were set for delivery of services and products in the areas of public access, permitting, enforcement & compliance assistance, state, tribal and local grants, partnership programs, rulemaking, and research grants.
- **Process Groups** that developed and tested the standards now are leading their implementation.
- The **Customer Service Steering Committee** (26 individuals representing all Regions, Offices and several other organizations) sets the policy for the Agency's CSP.
- Most Offices and all Regions have named **Coordinators** for standards and training "rollout", and have established customer service groups to assist the Coordinators.
- **Goals** for correspondence and telephone responsiveness, treatment of customers, relationships with partners, and customer involvement were developed to apply to any work at EPA and provided to all employees in May 1997. (EPA's Six Principles of Customer Service)
- EPA CSP staff and others involved in implementing the CSP participate fully in the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) customer service activities and help lead the Federal Interagency Regulatory Reinvention Forum.

Evaluating

- A “generic” Customer Satisfaction Information Collection Request (**ICR**) is in place, enabling expedited (10-15 day) clearance of survey instruments.
- The ICR application included a plan that lists as many as 900 customer **surveys** and 150 different survey instruments across the Agency from 1998 -2000.
- Many of the surveys will help to **establish** the **baseline** qualities of current service delivery of correspondence, telephone and other services and products.
- A work group is developing Agency wide **Guidelines for customer satisfaction feedback** and measurement.
- Five small **benchmarking studies** have been done to seek out best practices and successful methods that others have used to implement organizational change. Lessons learned assisted EPA in designing its training, telephone, complaints systems questionnaire and overall program.

Improving

- **Training** has been developed and is now being launched to assist everyone at the Agency to improve service delivery. All customer service training is voluntary.
- An **introductory customer service course** was developed and trainers are being prepared to teach the new, EPA-specific module, “Forging the Links”.
- Nearly 200 trainers have been certified to teach the six follow up customer service **skills courses**.
- **Telephone** service improvement projects are in place or being developed in several regions and offices.
- **Videos** on telephone service, conflict management and customer service awareness are available from the CSP.
- **Complaint systems** across the Agency are being documented and best practices will be shared.
- A customer service excellence **rewards and recognition system** is being developed in cooperation with union, labor relations and human resources staff.

